

OBSERVATIONS

12°

ON THE

INSTRUCTION OF BLIND PERSONS,

IN A

LETTER

TO

ROBERTS VAUX, JOHN VAUGHAN AND ROBERT WALSH,

ESQUIRES.

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JUL-30-1898

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BY JULIUS R. FRIEDLÄNDER.

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

THE annexed communication is published with a hope, that it will interest public spirited and benevolent citizens in behalf of the proposition to Instruct the Blind. The services of the intelligent and estimable writer, who is fully equal to the duty of imparting knowledge to this class of persons, should be secured for our city and state. After sufficient time is afforded for the general perusal of this letter, it is contemplated to call a meeting of such gentlemen as may be disposed to promote the object, and to organize an Association for carrying the plan into effect.

The plan can be recommended with the greater confidence, as a singular instance of talent in a Blind person was exhibited by Dr. Moyse in this city, who many years ago gave a most interesting and popular course of lectures on Natural Philosophy.

LETTER.

PHILADELPHIA, JANUARY 7, 1833.

ROBERTS VAUX, JOHN VAUGHAN, ROBERT WALSH, ESQUIRES.

GENTLEMEN,

CONFORMABLY to your desire, I shall endeavour to communicate to you a few cursory remarks upon the subject of an Institution for the Education of the Blind, and its essential advantages; and will hereafter give my views more fully.

That persons who are born blind, or those who have become so through misfortune at an early age, are susceptible of education, is sufficiently proved by experience; and, indeed, those who are endowed with natural talent, can, by proper instruction and assistance, attain an incredible proficiency. Experience for a long time past has induced the establishment of public and private institutions, in most parts of Europe, and also in the United States, which have excited a general interest, and are at this moment bright examples of humanity, well calculated to affect in the most pleasing manner the sensibility of the philanthropist.

The earliest records of history inform us of many remarkable blind persons, and almost every age has exhibited numerous instances of them, of whom permit me to quote a few in support of my position.

Hulderich Schoenberger, born at Weidu in 1601, became blind in his third year. He was very much neglected in his youth; but when sent to school to pass away his tedious hours, he caught up very quickly what he heard, and unfolded his dispositions. He studied at the academy at Altdorf, became, at Leipsic, master of arts, and went afterwards to Holstein, where he taught with approbation, and some years later he gave lectures. He understood not only his native language, but also the French, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Syriac, and also the Arabic, in which he gave instruction. He wrote the Oriental languages by means of letters formed of wire, in which he likewise instructed. In mathematics, and natural and moral philosophy, his knowledge

was extensive. He played upon different instruments, particularly on the organ, which he manufactured himself. At Koenigsberg, he held disputations about colours, and the rainbow, and explained the origin of the colours. He played very well at ninepins; shot right at a mark, when its place was pointed out to him by knocking.

Rolli, born at Rome in 1685, became blind in his fifth year; he acquired a great knowledge in medicine, and a high degree of proficiency in mathematics. He was also a poet, and wrote different kinds of poetry, among which the tragedy of Porsenna is in print.

The celebrated Saunderson, at Thurstleton, in the year 1682, became blind in his second year; by industry he acquired an extensive knowledge of the dead languages, particularly of the Latin. Besides music, in which he distinguished himself on the flute, mathematics was his favourite occupation, and he raised himself in it so high, that he drew the attention of his contemporaries. He enjoyed the friendship of Sir Isaac Newton, on whose works he gave lectures, and was nominated by a mandamus from George II. as a Doctor of Law and Professor at the University of Cambridge. The Royal Society of London elected him one of their members, and after his death the University of Cambridge published his mathematical works. Saunderson was married and had a daughter who could see.

Griesinger, born at Worms in the year 1638, became blind in his third year: he began to study in his nineteenth year, learned eight languages, disputed with applause at Gena, where he became master of arts. In 1693 he was employed as a preacher at St. George's Hospital at Koenigsberg. Several of his disputations and one sermon are printed.

Gough became blind in his earliest year. He wrote different disputations on natural philosophy and chemistry, of which one was read before the Philosophical Society at Manchester.

Peter Hureng of Caen in Normandy, became blind in his ninth year, and could repair all kinds of watches. He knew the defects of the watches by feeling.

Therese V. Paradies, born at Vienne in 1759, became blind in the second year of her age. She was finely educated, and played on the piano in high perfection. She gave concerts at Paris, London and Berlin with great applause, and instructed herself in Vienne.

Poignon, born blind, was a pupil of the Paris Institution, and obtained in the year 1805 the premium in the mathematics (Lycée Charlemagne.)

Galliot, also a pupil of the same Institution, is a splendid musician, particularly on the violin. Besides other objects of science, he is a very good printer. His wife, a very good musician too on

the piano, has also been a pupil of the same establishment. They are the parents of a girl who can see, and has a great talent for music.

Geipels, a blind man in the paper mill at Plauen, is the inventor of a waterpress, by which two men, by the help of water-power, in one minute and a half execute as much as six or eight men could do in five minutes. The paper prepared after his prescription by the waterpress, becomes more firm, and receives the sizing better.

Joseph Kleinhars, born at Nauders, in Tyrol, became blind in his fourth year. He made crucifixes and holy figures of wood, in which all parts were in due proportion, and which expressed affliction, delight, and other affections of the mind. He made statues from less than a foot high to the common size of the human body, which would do honour to many clear-sighted artists. He also carved in great perfection heads or busts of living persons, which he took off by feeling either from nature or from casts.

Jacob Braun was born in 1795, and became blind in the third year of his age. He was the first pupil with whom Director Klein at Vienne, made the first experiment to discover his power of receiving education, and upon which successful experiment was founded the Institution for the Blind at Vienne. Braun was profoundly instructed in reading, writing, arithmetic, history and in geography, as in music. He could moreover perform many handiworks, such as making laces, baskets, &c. He also learned turner's and joiner's work. In both of these he succeeded so well, that he can execute very fine works, and is now himself a teacher in the same Institution. He purchases all the wood that he wants, knows good wood from bad by feeling, judges of its value and utility, and knows how to employ it in the most economical manner.

Many more instances might be added to show that blind persons, (even by their own unaided exertions) may acquire the knowledge of arts that render their existence at once useful and agreeable; this shows the importance of directing their efforts, towards shortening and facilitating their labours, by means of a suitable education, which will inspire them with courage and hope, rescue them from idleness, and make them not only useful, but often valuable members of society.

These views have been acknowledged by a number of judicious men, and successful experiments of the cultivation of the blind, (an inestimable blessing to this unfortunate race) have corresponded with them.

The noble philanthropist Haüy, established first in Paris, in the year 1784, an institution for the blind, and to this excellent example, all the existing institutions are much indebted. Their progress to a greater perfection was a security for its undisputed

benefit. Boston offers us a nearer example. The existing institution there, which has made a very favourable beginning, has Mr. Tranchery, a blind person, for its principal teacher, who has received an excellent education in the Paris Institution, and will no doubt fill his station with success. Beside him, there are several others, whom I knew in the Institution of Paris, who might be employed in a similar manner, which, by the increase of such institutions, will be requisite.

The exertions in the different states to form institutions for the blind, to give them an education conformable to their situation, is a striking proof that the want of them is every where felt, and that it will not only add honour to a state to adopt, as it were, those unfortunate and helpless beings, but a great benefit may arise therefrom, as it thereby creates so many more happy citizens, and removes numerous beggars, the sight of whom must be painful to every feeling heart.

The lately established institution in New York, held a short time since a public examination, which excited great interest, and there is no doubt that it will succeed.

The trial I have made here during a very short time with one blind boy, has, by its success, excited in you and many others the desire to establish a school for the blind in this city. I dare believe myself, conscientiously, equal to this undertaking, and under the patronage of benevolent persons, it would not be too hard a task for me to emulate the existing institutions.

My ideas for establishing such an one in Philadelphia, are the following: in the first place, there does not offer any where a better opportunity than in this place. According to Mr. Wills's testament, a house is building in Race street, which very probably will be finished the ensuing spring. This building has been destined by that charitable man for an Asylum for the Blind and Lame. Who does not hereby remember the fable of the blind and lame?

Heterogeneous as is this union of those two unfortunate classes, still the object of the philanthropic testator is praiseworthy, and that house in future might be of great service to us, as an auxiliary, although it cannot as a principal building, because the lame and the blind cannot be mixed together, consistently with the objects of the education of the latter, and it does not appear large enough to be divided into separate apartments. But after that education shall be completed, the building may be used very advantageously for the benefit of the blind. In every institution of this kind, it is necessary to have a house adjoining the principal one, for the use of those pupils who are orphans or destitute, so that, when they leave the school, they may enter there, and pursue what they formerly learned, to gain a livelihood, and be kept

in due order and under proper direction, and in this way Mr. Wills's building might be used.

Concerning this matter, I shall at some other time explain more at large the indispensable necessity of this establishment.

This, however, is a matter of secondary consideration, nevertheless, it is a fact which admits of no dispute, that blind persons, during the course of their education, must be entirely separated from all other influences.

The most certain, and the shortest way to attain our object, may be that of raising a subscription; much charity is bestowed upon the poor blind, how much better will it be to spend it for the benefit of an institution which will endeavour, and has the power to elevate such dependent people to the rank of useful men, to make blind persons of rich or easy families, happy members of society.

Should we not be able to obtain the house in Race street, according to our desire, it will be necessary to rent a house well situated, if possible with a garden, under the management of a man and woman, who will, at the same time, have the care of the pupils. Furthermore, I should want an assistant, whom I will instruct in the beginning, in order to aid me in different objects of instruction, as I shall have so much to do with the direction of all and with the preparation of different things, by which I think to save in the beginning a great deal of expense.

This is most essential to remark, and what is requisite for our commencement. Afterwards, with perhaps eight or twelve pupils, I confidently assert, that in a very short time our undertaking must increase of itself, and I am sure, the state of Pennsylvania herself, (that contains five hundred and three blind persons,) will bestow her attention upon this matter, which is really worthy of it; till then I place confidence in the humanity of the inhabitants of Philadelphia, for the common benefit, and hope they will help to erect and strengthen an institution by charitable contributions, which will promote the happiness and prosperity of those unfortunate beings who are deprived of the light of heaven, the greatest blessing of life, and which at a future time will be a noble monument of our age, and will secure the gratitude of after generations.

One thing I have yet to mention here, I mean the qualifications of pupils to be admitted. The requisite age I have already spoken of, is from seven to fourteen, but, with particular exceptions, older persons may be also admitted. Undoubtedly that age is the most desirable, and, according to the statement of the whole number of blind in Pennsylvania, it may be, that about a tenth part number those years, consequently all the blind of the young generation of the state could be admitted, with certain

qualifications, when the establishment shall be extended to about fifty pupils.

Occasionally I expect to explain to you every thing else worth knowing about these matters.

Finally, I add to you hereby my testimonials, by which you can know my former relations. Having been during three years as a teacher in the public institution for the blind in Baden, I am now here, with the ardent desire, and, I trust, the capacity to be useful to unfortunate humanity.

Your most obedient,

J. R. FRIEDLANDER.

Recommendations.

I do hereby unsolicited and with pleasure testify, that Mr. J. R. Friedländer was two years and seven months in my house employed as a tutor. He gained in every respect my perfect satisfaction, and deserves an unlimited praise on account of his deportment and character, which were entirely faultless and honest. I should have kept him still longer in my service, were it not his own wish to change his future destination. My hearty gratitude accompanies him on his voyage for his amiable treatment of my children, and the interest he always felt for them.

CHARLES EGON,

Prince of Furstenberg.

D'Onaueshingen, 6th May, 1828.

I with pleasure hereby testify, that the bearer of this, Mr. J. R. Friedländer, who devoted his studies in the year 1828, to the instruction of the blind in the institutions of Paris and London, and who officiated as my secretary, and was subsequently teacher in Bruchsal, at the asylum for the blind, has by his industry and knowledge, and by his deportment and his performance in his profession, as likewise on all other occasions, always won my especial satisfaction. I therefore consider it my duty to recommend him particularly to every person, and sincerely wish him many patrons and friends in his new undertaking in the United States.

WILLIAM,

Margrave of Baden.

Carlsruhe, 19th Jan'y, 1832.

DR. A. E. FOOTE

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Friedlander Julius R.
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